

# The Creed of a Propagandist: Letter from a Confederate Editor

BY RICHARD BARKSDALE HARWELL

*Some amazingly modern views on journalism are contained in a letter written in 1864 by Henry Hotze, propaganda agent of the Confederacy in England. Mr. Harwell, who uncovered the document, is assistant librarian in charge of special collections at Emory University, Atlanta.*

IN THE TURBULENT SPRING OF 1861, among the first Southern troops to leave for the battlefields of Virginia were the élite Mobile Cadets, a military company of the socially prominent citizens of the Gulf city. Among the privates of the company was Henry Hotze, whose charm of manner and brilliancy of intellect more than compensated for his lack of Southern family background. Hotze's abilities guaranteed for him a rapid rise in the Confederate army and soon placed him in a position of responsibility in the Confederate State Department. Hardly a year after the opening of the American Civil War, Henry Hotze was the Confederacy's most effective propaganda agent and was conducting in London his own propaganda organ for the South, named *The Index*.<sup>1</sup>

Hotze was born in Zurich, Switzerland in 1834.<sup>2</sup> He came to America as

a child and was naturalized in Mobile on his 21st birthday. His intellectual accomplishments were exhibited and his thorough indoctrination into Southern ways of thinking was indicated when, at the age of 22, he published a translation and adaptation of the extreme *L'Inégalité des Races* of Count Arthur de Gobineau as *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races*.<sup>3</sup> This book was a first step in the ways of propaganda that only a few years later bore out Hotze's early promise.

In 1858 Hotze was appointed by Secretary of State Lewis Cass as secretary of the American legation in Brussels. Congress, however, failed to appropriate necessary funds and, after serving as secretary and as Chargé d'Affaires in Brussels, he returned in 1859 to Mobile and found a place for himself on the

<sup>1</sup> *The Index* was published in London in semi-annual volumes from May 1, 1862 to Aug. 12, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical information concerning Hotze has been derived chiefly from an obituary editorial in the [Mobile] *Daily Register* of May 11, 1887. Acknowledgment should be made also to the master of arts thesis written at Emory University in 1948 by Robert F. Durden. An autobiographical "Three Months in the Confederate Army" was published by Hotze serially in the first volume of *The Index*.

<sup>3</sup> *The moral and intellectual diversity of races, with particular reference to their respective influence in the civil and political history of mankind*, from the French of Count A. De Gobineau: with an analytical introduction and copious historical notes, by H. Hotze; to which is added an appendix containing a summary of the latest scientific facts bearing upon the question of unity or plurality of species, by J. C. Nott, M. D., of Mobile. Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1856. xvi, 512 pp. Gobineau's theories were not lost and forgotten with the military solution of the American race question but were revived by the Nazis as a basis for their nationalistic sociology.

Mobile *Register*, then under the editorship of John Forsyth. Hotze left the *Register* to go to war with the Cadets, who were mustered into Confederate service as a part of the Third Alabama Regiment in April 1861. Sent to protect the environs of Norfolk, the Alabamans were not in the campaigns of 1861. But Hotze was not one to spend his time solely in the enjoyment of comparatively tranquil camp life. He continued to write articles for the *Register*. His abilities found him a place on the regimental staff. Before the summer was over he had been sent on a special mission to London by Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker. On his return he was appointed by Secretary of State Robert M. T. Hunter as commercial agent for the Confederate States in London and was once more sent to England.

The establishment and effective conduct of the *Index* was only a part of Hotze's mission to London, but it was his pet project. And it was the *Index* which, successful all out of proportion to the success of Confederate arms, should have insured for him a lasting reputation as a propagandist. But the collapse of the Southern Confederacy in the spring of 1865 spelled the doom of the paper. A journal with policies openly sympathetic to the Southern cause could not survive such radically changed conditions, and the paper ceased publication the following August.

The contrariety of a successful propaganda organ for an unsuccessful cause and the actual physical rarity of a paper which exists today in extremely few files have combined to obscure the reputation which might have been Hotze's. He abetted his progress toward oblivion by never returning to the United States although he maintained his American citizenship until his death. After a postwar career as a publicist in

England and France he died at Zug, Switzerland in 1887.

✱ DURING THE EARLY WEEKS OF HIS service in London, Hotze endeavored to place information favorable to the Confederate cause in the columns of established papers. His first contribution to the English press appeared in the *Morning Post* for February 22, 1862 as the principal leader (editorial).<sup>4</sup> His dispatch to Secretary Hunter is evidence of the adroitness of Hotze's operations:

In reading it, you will make due allowances for the necessity under which I felt myself of studiously maintaining an English point of view, and not advancing too far beyond recognized public opinion. . . . I have already learned from various sources that it has produced "a deep impression" in the clubs which are the principal foci of public opinion in the metropolis, and have been amused by having my attention called to it as unmistakably an emanation from Lord Palmerston.

In the same letter Hotze reported:

. . . I confess that the nearer I approached the scene of my labors the more the difficulties of my position loomed up before me, and on arriving here as the advocate of our case through the most fastidious press in the world, a stranger with barely a few friends or introductory letters, with no extensive political or literary reputation to precede me and smooth my way, I felt almost disheartened. Now the most formidable obstacles are overcome. The columns of the journals to which I most desired access are open to me, and with this I have acquired the secret of the "open sesame" of the others I may need.

Hotze's "open sesame" was the fact that the "first-class English journals" usually paid 2 to 10 guineas for editorials. His method was to present his

<sup>4</sup> Hotze to R. M. T. Hunter, Feb. 23, 1863. Printed in U. S. Navy department. *Official records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, ser. II, v. 3. (Washington, 1922), pp. 346-47. Hereafter cited as *ORN*.

articles to professional leader writers who would then sell them to the London papers. Thus, Hotze got his propaganda into the press without open evidence of its Confederate inspiration, the professional leader writers got their 2 to 10 guineas, and the papers got their leaders. But direct pay to the writers was not Hotze's only method of obtaining the talents of English writers. He referred in his accounts to "little personal compliments" consisting of Cuban cigars, American whiskey and other articles scarce in London.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his successes in planting Confederate opinion in the established British press, Hotze soon determined that what was most needed was a paper designed to represent the South in all things; to act as a "machine for collecting, comparing, and bringing before the public with proper comments the vast amount of important information which is received in Europe through private channels."<sup>6</sup> With the help of two friends from the South and of James Spence, a prominent Confederate sympathizer in Liverpool, the *Index* was established and made its first appearance on May 1, 1862 as *The Index: A Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature, and News*. Inaugurated on a shoe-string and conducted only in part from the meager subsidy allowed by the Confederate government, the paper soon earned for itself a prominent and influential position.

The following letter catches the career of the *Index* in mid-flight, and Hotze at his best. It is Hotze writing to a young Englishman he has engaged to take over editorial duties on the paper. In explaining to him his concep-

tions of the genius, the skill and the art of the editor, Hotze sets on paper a remarkable credo for a journalist (be he propagandist or newsman), the man who "know[s] what his readers desire to know, & [finds] it out for them."

\* \* \* \* \*

London Aug. 11 [18]6[4]<sup>7</sup>  
(Sent Sep 10.)

John George Witt Esq<sup>8</sup>

My dear Witt

I have not written to you sooner because I intended when I did write, that it should be a good long letter, & for such compositions I cannot find time at will, nor indeed could you have had time to read while you were entering Eton in the princely style of a four-horse carriage, & despotically putting little boys to the torture.

But, to come to my present business, which is to explain to you some of my views about the *Index*, at a moment when your own career is about being, in some sense, & I trust for a long period, identified with the paper. In the first place, I am truly glad that you have come to so pleasant an understanding with Hopkins.<sup>9</sup> Not that I ever doubted

<sup>7</sup> This letter is preserved in a manuscript copy in Hotze's private letter book now in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress.

<sup>8</sup> John George Witt is undoubtedly one of the "two gentlemen" mentioned in Hotze's dispatch to Secretary of State Benjamin of July 29, 1864: "In England I am about to complete arrangements to which I vaguely alluded several months ago . . . by intimately identifying with the editorial conduct of the *Index* two gentlemen who combine with a zealous devotion to our principles and our cause the highest academical distinction, well merited popularity and influence, and a social position as honorable in the present as it is promising for the future. . . ." *ORN*, ser. II, v. 3, p. 1178. The other gentleman alluded to was Percy Greg.

<sup>9</sup> Hotze introduced J. B. Hopkins to Secretary Benjamin in his dispatch of Sept. 26, 1862: ". . . my manager and assistant, J. B. Hopkins, esq., whose excellent judgement has been strikingly attested whilst representing me in the *Index*. Mr. Hopkins is an Englishman who has zealously and successfully applied himself to the study of the great question involved in the independence of the South. . . ." *ORN*, ser. II, v. 3, p. 537.

<sup>5</sup> R. F. Durden, *The Index: Confederate newspaper in London, 1862-1865*. (M. A. thesis, Emory University, 1948), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Hotze to J. P. Benjamin, April 25, 1862. *ORN*, ser. II, v. 3, p. 400.

it would be so, but you are, so to speak to be married together, & it is important to both that the relation should be mutually agreeable. Hopkins is a man of high moral worth, & whom I value exceedingly. What he lacks in brilliancy, readiness, & accurate scholarship, he compensates for by a judgment which is generally sound & always sober, & by a devotion to duty and conscientious fidelity to the cause, which are beyond all praise. I think that you will find his experience & advice of vast benefit to you. I have therefore endeavoured to remove from the change anything that could wound his *amour propre*, & while he will resign into your hands his editorial functions, & limit himself more strictly to those of manager, I would suggest that the line of demarcation be not too strongly drawn, & that you fully consult with him in your own department & he in return receive your suggestions in all that concerns the material interests of the paper.

I propose for the present to fix your salary at the rate of £ 300 per annum, payable quarterly. Of any future development in the fortunes of the Index you shall have the benefit. We are now in eager chase after a house, & in a few weeks hope to have a local habitation, if not worthy of our exalted destinies, at least comfortably adequate to our present wants.

The precise scope of your editorial powers I cannot yet define. It is impossible from my peculiar connection with the Confederate Government, and my knowledge of the Southern people & Southern politics that anybody not so situated shoul[d] be able to fill my place. If then, as I am fond of doing, I compare the Index to a little Kingdom of mine, I may say that I have as yet no intention of abdicating. I look upon you & Hopkins as my trusted & beloved

ministers, & I mean in future to reign rather than govern. Joking apart I have for the Index the same weakness that a man has for an estate which he has amassed by his own industry & perseverance, & the management of which he is slow to resign even to those he has selected for his heirs. Of two things, however, you may rest assured, one that I will never needlessly or arbitrarily interfere with the work, & that I will take care that each worker receives his full share of whatever credit or reputation may be earned by the whole.

The cherished ambition of my life is to make the Index a worthy representative in journalism of the highest ideal of that Southern civilization which is as yet only in its infancy. This ideal is as far removed from a blind idolatry of the past as from the conceited contempt of the past, which characterizes our age. It is but faintly expressed in the hackneyed phrase of "liberal conservatism." It means progress without subversion, liberty with order, fraternity without equality, love & good-will to all men without professional philanthropy; it is trust in the wisdom of Providence rather than in human ingenuity. It is the opposite of Yankeeism of whichever hemisphere & whatever tongue or nationality, not even excepting Southern Yankeeism,—for there is such a thing. It is the protest against the heresies & fallacies peculiar to our century, which in its inmost heart exalts the steam-engine & the electric telegraph above God. I have spoken seriously because whenever I touch upon this subject, I am always thoroughly in earnest.

A journal which should adhere to such a creed, subordinating to it all other considerations of pecuniary or political success, will not, to be sure, reform the world, nor pretend to attempt it, because it will not be con-

ducted by either lunatics or fanatics; but such a journal must in time acquire influence & authority, & be a great accession of strength to the party, or sect, or country it represents. The more universal it becomes, that is to say, the more branches of human thought & the more topics of interest it can embrace, the more widely, provided the central idea be never lost sight of, will its influence & authority be felt.

In this lies the genius of the editor. To be cosmopolitan & yet to have a country, to be miscellaneous & yet to have an object; to be tolerant & yet not indifferent; to be moderate & yet to have strong convictions; to be instructive & yet not dull; to be entertaining & yet not frivolous; this is the unattainable editorial perfection which should be aimed at. He should see with the eyes of the public, & hear with the ears of the public, & yet have eyes & ears of his own. The fault most men commit, & which I constantly commit, is to fancy that what does not interest me does not interest the public, & to act as if a distasteful subject was disposed of by being passed in silence. Try, as far as possible, to avoid this fault. Try to make the Index more & more a newspaper, an epitome of the world, where each thing has its appropriate place, & where none occupies too much. With the American question we cannot do this, but in time we may approach nearer to symmetry even in that.

It is easier to make rules than to keep them, & to preach than to practice. But I have you by the button-hole now, & may not find another so good opportunity for a lecture on the theory & philosophy of journalism. Be patient therefore, while I give you yet a few more details, rather of my experience than of my practice.

English journalism as a rule sacrifices

too much to the "leader." American journalism is too careless of it. The "leader" gives body, tone[, ] flavor, character, to a newspaper; but it is not the newspaper itself. Without its other departments symmetrically proportioned, a newspaper would only be a magazine, or a leaf out of a volume of essays. A paper is always judged by its "leaders" (because they are to it what the face is to the human body) but it is scarcely ever bought or read for its leaders.

What people buy a newspaper for is, as the name implies, the *news*. Not necessarily or exclusively the current events of the day, but *information* on something they desire to know. I have told you above in what an editor's *genius* consists. It is to know what his readers desire to know, & to find it out for them. But there is something practically even more important than *genius*; it is *skill*. Now an editor's *skill* consists in dressing the information he has to give in the most attractive manner, & to display it in the most accessible way. It is *pièce de résistance* which give *éclat* to a dinner, but it is the uniform excellence of all the dishes & of the service, which puts the guests in good humour & keeps them in good digestion. Just so it is with editorial gastronomy. Pay, therefore, if you wish to succeed as an editor, the most scrupulous attention to the *details* of the paper. These are very generally neglected, & in the Index peculiarly so. Nor must you think such work on details beneath editorial dignity. There is practically more influence to be exerted by a casual comment in a note or a paragraph, or by the mere turn of the phrase in which a bit of intelligence is given, than by the leader column, properly so called. The latter is the heavy artillery of a newspaper, which, though it makes more noise, kills fewer than well-direct-

ed & well sustained fire of small arms.

I have spoken of the genius of the editor & of his skill. Let me say a word of the editor's *art*. As of other things, so here, of course, the *ars celare artem* is the highest. But the special art of the editor is to have always something in his *bill of fare* which tempts the appetite of the public, & to display it conspicuously without descending to the vulgar catch-penny tricks of the trade. It is not possible to command that something at will & it is therefore often good policy, in seasons of abundance, to lay by for the season of scarcity. Still, that species of economy can be carried too far as newspapers' tit bits are apt to get stale, & it is better on the whole to have occasionally a dull paper, than by straining too hard after uniformity, arriving at—uniform dullness.

In a weekly paper, more particularly one which addresses itself to a distant public, there is always an unfailing resource, to which, before concluding, I should not omit to direct your attention. It is "selections." I know scarcely a department of a paper in which the genius, the skill, & the art of the editor is so thoroughly tested. He there requires that little of each which in the aggregate is called *tact*. The best advice I can give

you in this respect is to cut or copy whatever in your reading, serious or miscellaneous, strikes you as curious, interesting or otherwise worthy of preservation—a brilliant thought, a bit of quaint statistics, a felicitous expression, strays & waifs & odds & ends of all sorts. Depend upon it they will be welcome to your readers & oblige those you can quote from. The way to use such matter is to throw it into a drawer or a box & draw upon this reserve fund as occasion may serve.

In this matter you avoid the greatest dangers of editorial life, that of padding & stuffing, & hastily finding "copy" only to fill up space, becoming thus the slave of the mechanical exigencies of the paper. This danger is even greater than that of "over-setting," having too much "copy," by which the foreman of the printing-office becomes your colleague. A model paper has always a little over, but never too much.

And so I end my epistle, which, commenced long since & resumed at different periods, has grown to an intolerable length. I can only promise (& with safety too) that in future I will spare you such inflictions, & I remain

With kindest & most cordial feelings

Sincerely your friend

[Henry Hotze]

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*"Someday Joe Stalin will die or be killed, and most probably there will be attendant chaos with Russia's attention suddenly turned inward upon herself. Or a conservative, if not reactionary, Republican administration may put sharp brakes on our economy. Or profligate Democrats will wind us tighter and tighter till the spring breaks. Somehow, some day, and it may be sooner than you think, the plug will be pulled, and you will find yourself in the center of an ocean of merchandise that people don't buy.*

*"Every store and business in America will be cut down to bed-rock, dependent upon downright intelligent, effective, professional selling for its very existence—professional selling, selling that must be based on principles research has isolated, and proved, and organized for use."*—CLYDE BEDELL, in an address at the Second Annual Advertising Institute, Emory University, March 17, 1951.